

How Much Time Do Americans Spend Preparing and Eating Food?

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The American Time Use Survey (ATUS) collects information on how Americans spend a critical resource—their time. According to the 2003 data, employed men worked about an hour more than employed women on an average day, and about one-third of employed individuals worked on a given weekend day. About 20 percent of men reported doing housework at home on an average day compared with 55 percent of women. Half of all leisure time for both men and women was spent watching TV.

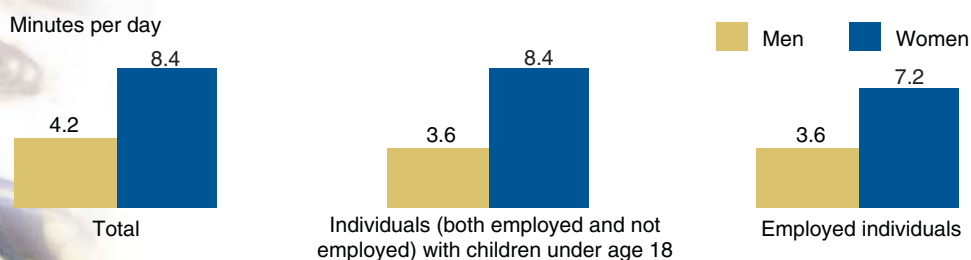
The Survey reports on time spent on work, household chores, child care, recreation, and numerous other activities. Estimates from the Survey show the range of detailed activities performed daily, how much time is spent in each activity, and how time is allocated by demographic group, labor force status, and weekdays versus weekends. Starting in 2005-06, the Survey will include an ERS-developed module

consisting of questions designed to examine time use; purchasing, preparing, and consuming food; and obesity.

Sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, the ATUS is a continuous, monthly survey that started in January 2003. Time diaries were collected from about 21,000 individuals in 2003 and about 14,000 in 2004 (due to a sample reduction). One individual from each sampled household is interviewed about his or her time use for the 24-hour period on the day before the interview (the "diary" day). Survey respondents are asked to identify their primary activity if they were engaged in more than one activity at a time. Results from 2003 and 2004 are available.

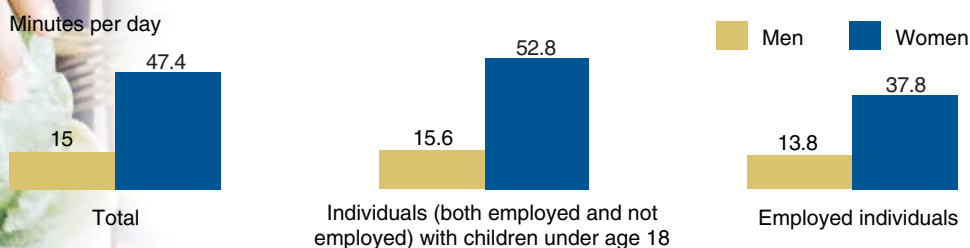
The basic Survey also provides estimates of time spent in several food-related activities, such as grocery shopping; buying other food,

On an average day, women spend more time grocery shopping than men

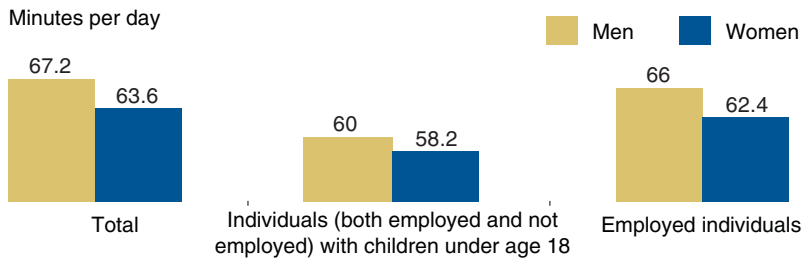


Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics 2003 data and estimates for individuals age 15 or older.

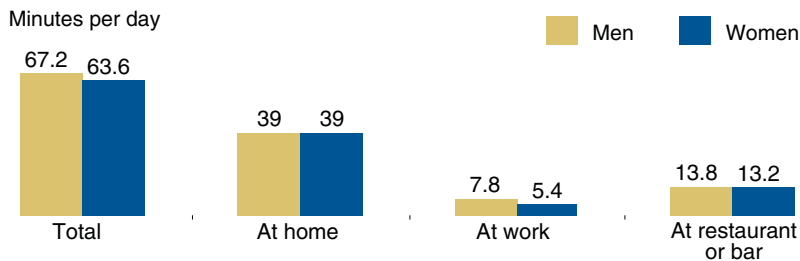
Women also spend more time on food preparation and cleanup than men



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics 2003 data and estimates for individuals age 15 or older.

However, men spend more time eating and drinking than women

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics 2003 data and estimates for individuals age 15 or older.

Most time spent in food consumption is at home

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics 2003 data and estimates for individuals age 15 or older.

such as prepared food; food preparation and cleanup; and eating and drinking as a main activity. All women—both employed and not employed—spent more time, on average, than did men on grocery shopping and meal preparation and cleanup. Women spent an average of 8 minutes a day grocery shopping, and men, 4 minutes, averaging across the entire population, including those who did not grocery shop. About 18 percent of women grocery shop on a given day for an average of 45 minutes compared with 11 percent of men who averaged 39 minutes. Employed women spent slightly less time on these activities than other women. Most of the respondents reported some eating and drinking as a main activity, with an average of 65 minutes spent in this activity. However, 9 percent reported no eating or drinking at all. Because the Survey also collects information on a respondent's whereabouts during most activities, the 2003 data reveal that an average of 39 minutes was spent eating and drinking at home versus an average of 13 minutes in restaurants.

The ATUS Food & Eating Module contains questions on eating while engaged in other activities, such as

driving or watching TV; height and weight; participation in the Food Stamp Program and school meal programs for children; grocery shopping and meal preparation; and household income. Funded by ERS and the National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute, the Module was added to the core ATUS in October 2005 and will continue through December 2006, with data available in 2007.

Information obtained from the Food & Eating Module will supplement time use diaries from the core ATUS interview. The information also will allow researchers to study the relationships between obesity, eating patterns, and time use; time use patterns by food stamp reciprocity status; and the relationship between the time use patterns of parents and their children's participation in school meal programs. Findings on these topics can help inform policies on and implementation of food assistance and nutrition programs.

This article is drawn from . . .

Food, Nutrition, and Time Use Patterns, available at: www.ers.usda.gov/emphases/healthy/atus/

Food & Eating Module Questions

[Note: actual Module questions in *italics*.]

Eating as a secondary activity—Because many Americans eat while engaged in other activities, such as driving or watching television, information is needed on eating as both a primary and secondary activity. This question will record when and during what activities the respondent was eating or drinking beverages:

We're interested in finding out more about how people fit meals and snacks into their schedules. Yesterday, you reported eating or drinking between [fill in times from respondent's time diary]. Were there any other times you were eating yesterday—for example while you were doing something else? About how long would you say you were eating while you were [fill in activity]? Not including plain water, were there any other times yesterday when you were drinking any beverages? About how long would you say you were drinking while you were [fill in activity]?

Height, weight, and general health—From this self-reported information, Body Mass Index (BMI) can be calculated, and time use patterns, such as activity levels and eating patterns, can be analyzed by BMI levels.

Food stamp benefit participation—*In the past 30 days, did you or anyone in your household get food stamp benefits?* This information will allow analysis of the time use patterns of food stamp recipients versus others, and in particular, low-income persons who are not participating in the program.

School breakfast and school lunch participation—*Please think back over the past week starting last Monday up to today, Monday. In the past week, did [Fill in names of children in the household under age 18] eat a BREAKFAST that was prepared and served at a school, a paid day care or Head Start Center, or a summer day program? This question refers to ONLY BREAKFASTS prepared at the school or center—not meals brought from home.*

What about LUNCH? In the past week, did [Fill in names of children in the household under age 18] eat a LUNCH that was prepared and served at a school, a paid day care or Head Start Center, or a summer day program? This question refers to ONLY LUNCHES prepared at the school or center—not meals brought from home.

Grocery shopping and meal preparation—*Are you the person who usually does the grocery shopping in your household? Are you the person who usually prepares the meals in your household?*

Household income—This question asks if total household income before taxes was above or below a certain amount. The ATUS Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing software automatically calculates whether the income level is more or less than 185 and 130 percent of the poverty threshold based on the respondent's household composition. These income thresholds—185 percent and 130 percent—determine income eligibility for food assistance programs.